APPENDIX IV

Using Learning Skills

A Report From Six Tennessee Families First Adult Education Programs
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A Report From Six Tennessee Families First
Adult Education Programs

The Center for Literacy Studies and the Tennessee Department of Human Services awarded five grants in 2000-2001 to local adult education programs to field-test the Learning Skills curriculum and to determine whether the curriculum would be useful to a wide variety of Families First classes. Knox County Adult Education volunteered to test the curriculum with its evening classes to bring the number of pilots to six.

Given differences in settings and student populations in adult education programs and classes, it was important to find out how flexible the curriculum is and whether it can be implemented in different program environments.

The purpose of the field test:
• Assess the effectiveness of the curriculum and make recommendations for improvement.
• Confirm that the skills identified in the curriculum will help Families First participants prepare for further classroom success.
• Identify different ways the curriculum can be implemented depending on a program’s needs and structure.

Initial Expectations of Supervisors and Teachers
The five programs’ supervisors and teachers received a two-day orientation training to the Learning Skills philosophy, approach, and curriculum. At the beginning of the training the supervisors and teachers were asked to share their hopes and expectations for the curriculum and the project in their programs. The following reflects the results and common themes of this activity.

— Find ways to motivate and retain Adult Education (AE) Families First students.
— Give students life skills to help them succeed after AE.

Peggy Davis, Trenton/Gibson

The five programs selected:

Trenton Special School District/Gibson County
Adult Education Program
Peggy Davis, Supervisor
Ernest R. Pounds, Families First Teacher

Hardin County
Adult Education Program
Judy Warrington, Supervisor
Dean Hagy, Families First Teacher

Henry County
Adult Education Program
Sue Quinn, Director
Lynette Travis, Adult Education Teacher
Donna Winders, Program Assistant

The Martha O’Bryan Center
Robert Regan, Family Education Program Director
Andrea Blackman, Adult Education Instructor

Nashville Opportunities Industrialization Center
Margaret McClain, Program Director
Una Fenderson, Families First Teacher

Knox County Adult Literacy Program
(Voluntary Participation)
Jane Knight, Adult Literacy Program Coordinator
Knox County Adult Literacy Program volunteered as a sixth program to test the curriculum with its evening classes to enhance the field-test feedback.
— Help students to see worth of themselves.
— Motivate students to stay in class.
— Help students to have a better attitude about themselves and life in general.

Ernest Pounds, Trenton/Gibson

Expect Learning Skills to help with:
— Motivation.
— Retention.
— Building self-esteem.
— Work ethics for job retention.

Judy Warrington, Hardin County

— Positive feedback from students.
— Students will be able to communicate and express their feelings more.
— Improve students’ self-esteem and self-worth.

Dean Hagy, Hardin County

My expectations:
— To get enough information to know how to have a better program.
— To boost motivation, retention, and overall to give some “pizzazz” to the program.

Una Fenderson, Nashville OIC

— Motivation.
— Retention.
— Change of attitude to “I can” and “I will.”
— Prepared for learning.
— Develop a passion for learning.

Sue Quinn, Henry County

— Different way to reach my students.
— To help students discover themselves and what they really want in life.
— Learn different ways to help the students stay on track.

Lynette Travis, Henry County

— To develop a means to help with student motivation and retention.
— To hopefully change some attitudes towards leaving the program.
— To “…light a fire.”
— To show students that they can and must take ownership of their learning.
— To show students that “true” learning occurs when the spark has been ignited.
— They begin to pursue knowledge on their own—becomes a passion.
  
  Robert Regan, Family Education at Martha O’Bryan

— I expect feedback from the data and information submitted to the Center for Literacy Studies, University of Tennessee, about our implementation.
— I expect a systematic method of individualized instruction, which uses innovative means.
— I expect to see a change in the perception of education and its values.
  
  Andrea Blackman, Family Education at Martha O’Bryan

An analysis of key phrases used by the supervisors and teachers to describe their expectations revealed the following common themes:

2. Retention 6
3. Develop a passion for learning – “Light the Fire,” Prepare for education and learning, pursue knowledge and its value, and take responsibility for learning 6
4. Systematic method of individualized instruction using innovative means, different ways to reach students and keep them on track, receive positive feedback 5
5. Build work ethics, skills to succeed, and communicate better 3
6. Students discover themselves and what they want in life 2
7. Information to have a better program and put some “pizzazz” in the program 2
8. CLS Feedback on data submitted on the various implementations 1

Keyword Groupings (fusion of expectations)

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<th>Changed View of Self</th>
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<td>Retention</td>
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<td>Ready to Pursue Learning</td>
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Initial Ideas and Implementation Strategies

During the training, programs had an opportunity to individually brainstorm and share their potential implementation strategies. These strategies were later refined as the program continued with the pilot. All field-test sites agreed upon a 14-week field-test window to adapt and test the curriculum within their respective programs. This time frame started shortly after the training session and ended May 29, 2001.

Each program adapted the curriculum to fit its students, localities, and specific program needs. The supervisors and teachers used the Learning Skills philosophical approach with the curriculum, as well as creating and developing additional lessons to make the curriculum successful.

**Trenton Special School District/Gibson County Adult Education**
- Select a group of 10 “mixed” regular Adult Education, Families First, and high-school dropouts aged 17, 18, and 19 years old.
- Use the Learning Skills curriculum for two hours each day for 32 days.
- Offer incentives.
- Have a celebration (graduation banquet).
- Provide a certificate of completion for students to frame and include in their resume.
- Involve AE, FF, Even Start, and FRC teachers in helping with teaching.

**Hardin County Adult Education**
First, allow time to gather all materials and supplies, schedule speakers and field trips. Develop the classroom atmosphere with the visual aids and other materials:
- Inform and orient the students about the program and have a question-and-answer session.
- Present a workbook as a guide for students.
- Set a date to complete project and be flexible with students about time limits for lessons.
- Set a time for instruction.
- Allow for two hours of instruction and stay on task.
- Use other signs of encouragement for students.
- Include students in “Thoughts for the Day” (Rainbow = Pot of Gold and obtaining their dreams).
- The Big Day…Graduation: Prepare a nice ceremony for graduates with a dinner, speakers, and presentation of certificates.
**Henry County Adult Education**

Learning Skills Class
- Monday - Thursday 12:15 p.m. - 4 p.m.
- Three classes:
  1. February 5 - March 1
  2. February 28 - March 23
  3. April 9 - May 8
- Limited class size: 15
- Recruitment: Invitational targeting
  1. Long-term learners
  2. Families First participants/DHS
  3. 18-year-old dropouts
  4. Dislocated workers
  5. Community agencies and industries (marketing)
- Incentives
- Motivational activities/Student involvement/Resource people
- Tangibles, etc. (For example, a candle symbolizes the “lighting a fire”)
- Perfect attendance
- Graduation program with certificates - possible banquet

**Martha O'Bryan and Nashville Opportunities**

**Industrialization Center**

Dates: February - April
- Target Plan: We plan to incorporate Learning Skills into our existing ABE class (all Families First clients).
- Expand homework component as a way of including children. (Continue “motivation” cycle at home.)
- Focus on attitude ideas of “STAR.”
- Change existing journal writing activities to “Thought of the Day” component.

**Knox County’s Adult Literacy Program**

Knox County did not participate in this initial training session, given its familiarity with and application of the curriculum over the previous three years. Knox County’s expectations and implementation strategies were:
- Students would be tested on Monday and Wednesday evenings and assigned to the next Learning Skills class available. (This was later modified to place students first in computer lab while waiting for Learning Skills class.)
- Students would attend six weeks of classes for six hours each week. (This was later changed to a four-week course.)
Bottom-Line Results

It works! It’s useful! It helps students, teachers, and programs. The concluding assumption is that everyone can use and adapt the approach and curriculum to add to existing classes and/or use in an orientation framework.

The response to the initial three inquiry areas is:
1. The curriculum is an effective tool not only for students but also for teachers wishing to add variety, motivation, and inspiration to their work.
2. The core skills identified in the curriculum will help Families First participants be better prepared for further classroom success, as well as success with their families, communities, and work situations. The additional lessons identified and developed by the field sites help to extend the effectiveness of the curriculum.
3. The curriculum can serve as a core foundation for various adaptations in orientation situations and in regular AE classrooms.

Further observations:
1. The Learning Skills philosophical approach works because it matches what teachers do and want to see happen in their classrooms for students.
2. The lessons and philosophy are adaptable and useful in varying degrees through the skillful use by teachers. The lessons serve as a very usable resource to bolster the teachers’ lesson repertoire.
4. The approach and curriculum stimulates other lesson ideas, approaches, and teacher enthusiasm.
5. Additional lessons are easily developed to extend the learning approach and meet students’ needs.

In the end, the field-test sites took the curriculum to another level of implementation through modification and integration to fit their programs’ needs, location, and students.

Learning Skills Curriculum Field Reports

The six field sites’ teachers and staffs brought their own unique creativity and strategies to portions of the curriculum. They also added their own sense of what would work best for their students, which provides a new
richness of approaches, lessons, and other unique features to the base curriculum. As each program acknowledged, the core curriculum that Knox County developed provided a solid foundation and resource to build upon. Another byproduct of this project, which reconfirmed Knox County’s experiences, was the philosophical and motivational themes that build a common thread throughout the curriculum. It is a belief in the students, their abilities, and their potential.

The following summary highlights information gained from the Field Site Reports. The complete reports for each field site are available upon request from the Center for Literacy Studies.

**Adaptations From the Programs**

The six programs field-testing the *Learning Skills* curriculum had more common experiences than dissimilar ones, despite initial differences in settings, student population characteristics, teaching styles, and program emphases. Each program adapted the curriculum to fit local realities and specific needs. Trenton left out some parts of the guide and added sections in science, math, and writing skills. Knox County made adjustments when teachers found they could not cover all the content in their time frame. Hardin County condensed some lessons to fit its time schedule and also deleted some materials “that seemed repetitious” and then used other parts as springboards to work on writing skills. Henry County added a lesson on self-esteem, expanded the lesson on essay writing, and added stress management to the Time Management lesson. Nashville Opportunities Industrialization Center (NOIC) adjusted classes to meet its time frame. Martha O’Bryan instructors suggested “tweaking” the curriculum to fit their program and stated that “the flexibility allowed during implementation was the greatest asset to the curriculum.”

**Initial Reactions of Teachers**

Some teachers who had not used the *Learning Skills* curriculum previously expressed hesitancy and some apprehension in getting started. Trenton hand-picked the class that piloted the program to give the program its best chance to succeed. Trenton also carefully scheduled the staff members who would assist and took special care to supply the right environment, “not only a special place to study but also the right materials.” At NOIC, the instructor admitted, “At first, I was a bit skeptical about incor-
porating it (*Learning Skills* curriculum) in the existing classroom…. It took a considerable amount of studying to really get started, but once I understood what the program was about, I was anxious to get started.” Hardin County advises that teachers “allow themselves plenty of time to review materials.” Henry County’s instructor “started to read this huge manual…to get familiar with its contents” and then “went to the Internet and did some research on Bloom’s, MI, learning styles, and any other terms introduced in this curriculum that I had not presented before to a class.” After this extra preparation, she found that “the lessons in the curriculum could be used just as they are with a few minor adjustments.”

## Impact on Students

The curriculum seemed to have aided teachers in connecting and sometimes bonding with students and setting a positive atmosphere or climate in the class conducive to learner progress. NOIC stated, “We developed a very good rapport and became ‘acquainted’ with students’ family members. Sharing information as a group enabled students to see learning as real as well as build their needs and goals. It also helped to increase their self-worth and foster their leadership skills.” Hardin County’s advice to instructors using the curriculum is “to listen to your students and be willing to make changes if needed.” Henry County’s advice was similar: “I need to be more attentive to the needs of my students…. I need to use a variety of approaches and different teaching methods in order to reach my students and this curriculum has helped me come to this conclusion…. I didn’t have any trouble presenting any of the material. I think we assume that our students cannot grasp some of this material and certain terms, but they can. It’s not always what we say, but how we say it.”

In addition, the curriculum helped adult learners bond with and be supportive of each other. NOIC adult learners “who were unresponsive became self-starters in that they prodded others to verbalize their opinions. There was also positive camaraderie among the students.” Henry County reported, “I see them opening up with the Communication Lesson. They tell the class about past mistakes in communicating with their parents and now with their families. The students have bonded more. They knew each other prior to class, but each class session, they are discovering more about each other.” In Hardin County, “We all cried when one student practiced her presentation. She talked about Friendship and the friends she had made in the class and how this class helped and
strengthened her. Never did I expect the response and comments I received from this class.”

Some students who were initially skeptical of the class seemed to have been won over as the class progressed, and instructors reported good participation and cooperation on the part of their adult learners. Hardin County started out with some students’ having “negative attitudes” and both practitioner and learners felt that there was “too much material to cover in one day.” Nevertheless, the teacher was able to respond in her log day after day that “Today was a good day!” and in the end reported that learners became motivated and excited about the program and adopted new approaches and strategies for learning. Trenton reported that “each student came away from the program with the belief that they could succeed no matter what problems or shortcomings they may have.... They participated in class, arrived at class on time and seemed to be truly interested in the fact that we were trying something new to help them succeed.” The attitudes of NOIC students “changed over the course of the Learning Skills program. They became more cooperative and paid closer attention to being academically prepared.... Attention span and confidence levels improved.” Henry County provided a glowing recommendation: “The adult learners in the two classes we presented loved the material.... Halfway through the classes we could see students change, come alive, gain confidence in themselves and the goals they have set.... They are having fun learning new information and no one seems bored.” Martha O’Bryan clients were reportedly “receptive and motivated” with the curriculum.

“Thoughts for the Day”

All instructors mentioned the “Thoughts for the Day” as a most important part of the program. Hardin County says, “It is like our cup of coffee in the morning. This is the students’ favorite part of the day.... It is the power point of the program that helps to stimulate and motivate the students to participate in the discussion and activities of the day. It is the heart of the program.” NOIC decided to focus on the “Thoughts for the Day,” seeing that part of the curriculum as an opportunity to incorporate a writing class. Other parts that teachers mentioned as particularly helpful in gaining learner involvement and participation were goal setting (Trenton, Hardin), emphasis on taking responsibility for one’s own learning (Trenton, Hardin, Martha O’Bryan), individual learning styles (Trenton, Martha O’Bryan), how to do homework (Trenton), communication

All instructors mentioned the “Thoughts for the Day” as a most important part of the program. Hardin County says, “It is like our cup of coffee in the morning.
Practitioners and learners alike experienced the culminating student experience, the oral presentation to their cohorts of a research topic, as a triumph. It was an achievement that few students had ever tried to accomplish before. Trenton reported that “at first…participants were reluctant to speak publicly, but...each did an exceptional job.... All agreed the program had helped them.” NOIC students were excited and enthusiastic about their presentations. Everyone in the center was invited to hear them, and their “students were highly complimented on their presentations.” Henry County instructors were pleased with the effort their learners were expending on this challenge and the pride learners were taking in their work. Instructors thought “the presentations were fantastic! Everyone did well.”

Graduation

Several programs concluded the Learning Skills curriculum with a separate celebration and/or graduation. Martha O’Bryan Center learners “developed a class skit based on concepts and ideas learned from the curriculum. The class wrote, starred in, and produced a 10-minute skit/performance designed to entertain guests during the graduation celebration.” The adult learners produced this skit without help from their instructors, wanting the production to be a surprise for the guests and their teachers. Teachers reported being “truly impressed!” The celebration also included a special luncheon and certificates of completion. Trenton had a pizza party with invited family members and also awarded certificates for completion of the program. Hardin County participants invited guests and ate out at a steak house. They received certificates and a gift. Henry County noted that their learners made “an extra effort to look nice,” and that “Graduation was beautiful.”
Program Outcomes

Among the program outcomes noted by teachers were improved attendance (Trenton, Hardin), improved test scores (Trenton, Hardin), learners motivated to continue their studies (Trenton), improved self-confidence and/or self-esteem (Trenton, Hardin), internalization of a “system and pattern of performance (that) helped them to set a routine of study” (Trenton), improved writing skills (NOIC), and improved verbal communication skills (NOIC). Instructors could notice change in their students during the course of the program. “My students were beginning to open up and express themselves more,” reported Hardin County. “(They) are now able to add more meaning to the Thought for the Day. They are able to look beyond the quote and realize the value it has on their lives…. My students have a vision, a purpose, in their lives, and that is to reach their goals.”

Summative Thoughts From Teachers

Teachers’ summative thoughts were that the curriculum was well received by the participants, and both teachers and adult learners found the curriculum inspirational. Trenton’s instructor stated, “I would recommend this program or an adaptation of the curriculum for any adult education program anywhere. We will try to implement the program into our regular Adult Ed. Programs…. ” Hardin County said, “The curriculum provided a wonderful change to our classroom as well as my approach to teaching. I will continue to use the tools and concepts and the “Thoughts for the Day”…. I think the program is wonderful.” Hardin County stated, “I do plan to continue to use the tools and concepts. I also plan to use the lessons in the Learning Skills program. This excellent program can be used in a variety of settings.” Henry County’s response was, “I would have to rate the effectiveness of this curriculum as excellent. We plan to continue our classes this fall…. I feel all ABE classes can use this program, whether they use the curriculum in a single class as we do here or if they decide to use separate lessons in their regular classroom. I feel the results would be worth it…. I love this class and the results I have seen so far.” NOIC stated, “This program is a very powerful model for the adult education program. With the collaboration of students and teachers, it provides the ‘fireworks’ that spark enthusiasm and action within the classroom.”
Practitioners have high hopes that their adult learners will take with them the attitudes and skills that they achieved through this curriculum. “Several of my students have plans to further their education. Our students have an opportunity to attend a small college here in Hardin County. I have two students who plan to go in the Nursing field. My students realize that these tools and concepts will follow them throughout their educational journey. They see the positive results that this program has had on them and hopefully it will continue to affect their lives.” Henry County practitioners could “see positive attitudes towards reaching goals they (learners) have set; changes they are set to make with their families and their own personal lives.” Instructors say they “have stayed in touch with most of the students who finish the Learning Skills class and all of them are doing well. Students who are working on their GED have a new attitude. Many students have finished school and have enrolled in tech school or have jobs. Teachers have made comments about certain students and how they have changed after completing the Learning Skills class. We have nothing but positive praise for this program.”

Finally, several instructors noted that using the curriculum had had a lasting influence on them as well as on their adult learners. Trenton noted, “This concept of setting goals can be used in any class or in any subject. Goal setting is also important in our lives outside the classroom. Every student and teacher can use the concept of taking responsibility.” The Hardin instructor said, “It provided me with fresh material, new tools and concepts, creative ideas and activities, and a great classroom environment.” She added, “The one thing this program has taught me is to be more organized. It has also helped me to focus more on my goals… (It) has also helped me as a teacher and a learner to communicate more with my students and to use the tools and concepts more…” The NOIC instructor reported “learning some valuable lessons…. The Learning Skills curriculum allowed me to see that the learners are just as important as the teacher. They both create a curriculum together which includes basic skills, study skills and life-related subjects…. Sharing my life experiences with students also helped them to understand that learning is mutual and the obstacles to attaining goals are not insurmountable…. Learn to go over those barriers and don’t let them stop you from achieving.”
Conclusion

The pilot testing of the *Learning Skills* approach and curriculum provided a wealth of useful materials, feedback, and additional, creative lessons and insights. This is only the beginning of what other Tennessee teachers and programs will do to use and expand this curriculum. The field sites' work with *Learning Skills* was an effort to pass along classroom teachers' best work. We encourage further use of the curriculum, adapting it as necessary to support classroom work and student needs and passing it along to others within your programs.

*Learning Skills* is more than a curriculum. It is a philosophical approach based on many of the core values we feel as adult educators. It is a teacher who brings his or her creative energy and motivation to the students and the classroom. It is the students who see “no limit” to what they can do if we help light their educational fire.

By providing this core curriculum, teachers can become inspired to try other nontraditional approaches to teaching. The curriculum helps reluctant teachers see that students will respond in a positive manner to other forms and skills of learning beyond the core GED subjects. In fact, the curriculum encourages linking the traditional subjects to life experiences in a new and exciting way to make learning come alive.

The curriculum encourages students and teachers to make the connection of linking classroom learning to life situations. The students learn how they can use the curriculum and their teacher’s modifications to not only work as a team in the classroom, but also most importantly take the skills home to their families, to their communities, and eventually to their work situations.

*Note:* For information on *Learning Skills* or the pilot sites’ reports, contact Jim Ford at the Center for Literacy Studies (jford@utk.edu or 865-974-4109).